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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)
SUBJECT: US-ROK CONSULTATIONS ON DPRK HUMANITARIAN
ASSISTANCE AND REFUGEES

REF: A. SEOUL 01946
[1](#)B. SEOUL 01947

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: At the second of three meetings between a U.S. delegation led by DAS Alex Arvizu and a ROKG delegation led by MOFAT DG for Korean Peninsula Peace Regime Huh Chul on September 24, Huh said the ROK would consider additional contributions of food aid or fertilizer to the DPRK only after the DPRK responds to the ROK's May 2008 offer of assistance. As of August, the ROKG had resettled 2,096 North Korean refugees in South Korea during the year, a 34 percent increase over the same period last year, and expects this trend to continue. Huh regretted the ROK could not immediately agree to the U.S. request to check the fingerprints of North Korean refugees seeking resettlement in the United States against the database of South Korean citizens, but committed to work toward a resolution of the issue. Huh agreed that it would be helpful to conduct a trilateral U.S.-ROK-UNHCR meeting and a separate U.S.-ROK bilateral meeting for more comprehensive discussions on North Korean refugee issues; he suggested the possibility of holding both meetings in Seoul in mid-November. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) A U.S. delegation led by EAP DAS Alex Arvizu and a ROKG delegation led by MOFAT DG for Korean Peninsula Peace Regime Huh Chul met in Seoul on September 24-25 to discuss (a) the Relationship between South and North Korea; (b) Humanitarian Aid to North Korea and North Korean Refugees; and (c) North Korean Human Rights Situation. This message reports on the second of these two-hour sessions.

Food Shortage, but No Crisis

[1](#)3. (C) The ROKG believes North Korea's annual grain need is 5.4 million tons and expects North Korea to produce some 4 million tons this year. With expected aid shipments, the ROKG estimates North Korea's grain shortage this year to be 730,000 tons. While noting the shortage, the ROKG sees no signs of famine, starvation, or evidence that the military is using its war reserves. North Koreans are coping with the shortage by planting home gardens and developing local markets. Since May 2008, the price of rice has fallen 40 percent, due largely to an infusion of aid, according to ROKG assessments.

ROKG Waiting to Hear from the DPRK on Food Needs

¶4. (C) Huh was firm that before the ROKG makes further commitments of food and fertilizer assistance to the DPRK, the DPRK must respond to the ROKG's May 2008 offer of 50,000 tons of corn. The DPRK has yet to do so. The DPRK's acceptance of the May offer would be the first step, Huh said, to increased assistance and dialogue. Huh clarified that the ROKG had recently renewed its offer and made clear that it remains on the table.

¶5. (C) Assistant Secretary to the President for National Security Strategy Lee Choong-myong said the DPRK has not responded to the May offer because it is attempting to tame the ROKG to provide aid on the DPRK's terms. But, Lee said, the ROKG would offer assistance on its own terms and that "beggars can't be choosers."

¶6. (C) Lee said the ROKG would not consider contributing to the World Food Program (WFP) appeal for assistance to the DPRK until the DPRK responds to the ROKG's May 2008 offer, unless the ROKG deemed the food situation in North Korea to be dire, which it does not now. Responding to DAS Arvizu's suggestion that the ROK provide fertilizer in order to assist with next year's harvest and complement U.S. food assistance, DG Huh reported that the ROKG was not seriously considering such assistance at this time.

No Pre-Conditions, but Expectations

¶7. (C) Huh said the ROKG's position is that humanitarian assistance should be provided without pre-conditions or

political considerations. Huh added that when the ROKG does provide assistance, it will expect increased transparency of the distribution system. The ROKG would also expect the DPRK to respond to other humanitarian issues like POWs and separated families.

Refugees on the Rise

¶8. (C) Kim Sung-soo, Inter-Korean Policy Division First Secretary, explained that the ROKG's basic position on DPRK refugees is: 1) accepting all who have a free will to resettle in the ROK; 2) preventing their repatriation to the DPRK; and 3) maintaining close cooperation with other countries and international organizations. DG Huh elaborated that the Lee Myung-bak administration was trying to be as responsive as possible in implementing this policy.

¶9. (C) According to Kim, as of August, the ROKG had resettled 2,096 North Korean refugees in South Korea during 2008, a 34 percent increase over the same period last year. The increase over last year comes despite a decline in refugees prior to the Beijing Olympics because of China's stepped-up enforcement of immigration laws. The ROKG has observed that since the Olympics ended, the numbers have started to rise again. There are 14,000 refugees already resettled in South Korea.

¶10. (C) With the increasing number of refugees, Ministry of Unification (MOU) Director of the Policy Planning Division Lee Jong-joo said the ROKG is under pressure to improve its resettlement programs to ensure refugees are successfully integrated into Korean society. Since 1999, the ROKG has run a re-education center, Hanawon, where newly resettled refugees receive 280 hours of instruction intended to provide initial protection, including medical services, social adaptation education, and basic vocational training. The ROKG also provides financial assistance in the form of cash allowances, medical insurance, tuition assistance, and rent subsidies.

¶11. (C) The ROKG has recently begun revising its support package to focus on employment opportunities as the key to successful resettlement. The MOU plans to offer more

vocational training, continue to subsidize employers who hire North Korean refugees by paying 50 percent of the refugee,s wages for two years, open employment promotion offices around the country, and create more internships leading to employment.

Fingerprint Roadblock

¶12. (C) Describing it as "one of the severest headaches" he had encountered in his current position, Huh said the ROKG is working to resolve privacy concerns that are blocking implementation of a system for checking fingerprints of North Koreans seeking refugee status in the U.S. to ensure that applicants for U.S. resettlement have not previously been resettled in the ROK. Huh said the ROKG had decided that the ROKG could continue to cooperate with the U.S. if the fingerprints were provided consensually and the use of the information derived from the fingerprints was limited to confirming whether the individual was or was not an ROK citizen. The ROKG had suspended its cooperation on fingerprints until it developed a mechanism to address privacy concerns by ensuring individuals consent, as well as certain unspecified technical issues. Huh intimated that it would take some time to resolve the ROKG's concerns. Moreover, Huh said the ROKG had similar issues to resolve with the UK and that the ROKG had decided to resolve the UK issues before addressing the U.S. request for fingerprint checks.

¶13. (C) In response to a U.S. request that the ROKG expeditiously process the pending cases of five refugees (one in Laos and four in the Czech Republic) according to the previously agreed process that included a fingerprint check, Huh replied he would consider it, but made no promise. "We note your hope," he said. (Subsequent progress on this issue will be reported septel.)

Agreed Need for Closer Cooperation

¶14. PRM Admissions Director Terry Rusch highlighted the important role that U.S.-ROK cooperation had played in the United States, effort to resettle North Korean refugees. Huh concurred that a U.S.-ROK-UNHCR trilateral meeting and a U.S.-ROK bilateral meeting focused on refugees would be helpful and suggested holding both meetings in Seoul, possibly in mid-November.

¶15. (C) Rusch explained that the &Thailand Model,⁸ in which U.S.-bound North Korean refugees from Thailand transit Seoul,s Incheon International Airport on ROK travel documents en route to the United States has helped move refugees more quickly. In response to Rusch,s proposal to extend this model to refugees departing from other countries, Huh agreed to extend this model as appropriate and necessary.

Limited Coordination on Assistance and Protection

¶16. (C) PRM Asia Near East Program Officer Meghann Curtis said the U.S. hoped to achieve better coordination on humanitarian assistance programs for North Korean refugees as they transit throughout the region. Curtis provided an overview of U.S. assistance efforts, and said the U.S. hoped to look to the ROKG for guidance on how to best direct expanded efforts. The ROKG did not provide input on its assistance efforts in third countries.

¶17. (C) Curtis reminded the ROKG of the strategy to combat sexual abuse and extortion of North Korean refugees that the U.S. had presented last year. Lee Eon-joung, Inter-Korean Policy Division Third Secretary, said the ROKG wanted to cooperate on combating sexual exploitation, but noted the

difficulty in identifying and punishing those responsible for the abuse.

Participants

¶18. (U) ROKG:

Huh Chul, Director General for the Korean Peninsula Peace Regime Bureau, MOFAT
Jin Gi-hoon, Director, Inter-Korean Policy Division, MOFAT
Lee Won-ik, Director, Korean Peninsula Peace Regime Division, MOFAT
Lee Choong-myong, Assistant Secretary to the President for National Security Strategy, Blue House
Lee Dong-yeol, First Secretary, North America Division 1, MOFAT
Lee Jong-joo, Deputy Director, Policy Planning Division, MOU
Yoo Chang-ho, First Secretary, Korean Embassy to the U.S.
Song Yong-min, Second Secretary, Inter-Korean Policy Division, MOFAT
Lim, Hyo-sun, Second Secretary, Inter-Korean Policy Division, MOFAT
Notetakers

U.S.:

Alex Arvizu, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Japan and Korea
Terry Rusch, Director of Admissions, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
Mary Comfort, Attorney-Advisor, Office of the Legal Adviser
Meghann Curtis, Asia Near East Program Officer, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
Michael Orona, Deputy Director, Office of Asia and the Western Hemisphere, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
Laura Rosenberger, Foreign Affairs Officer, Korea Office, Bureau of East Asia and the Pacific
Amy Patel, Desk Officer, Korea Office, Bureau of East Asia and the Pacific
Allison Hooker, East Asia Analyst, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Embassy notetakers
STEPHENS